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Jemima Claverton.

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JEMIMA CLAVERTON:

OR,

The Slanderer Punished.

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JEMIMA CLAVERTON:

OR,

The Slanderer Punished.

“YOU betray many marks of bad temper, Sophy,” said Mrs. Bateman to her daughter, who had been speaking ill of an absent friend—
“I have often observed,” she continued, “and with great pain noticed, your inclination not only to satirise, but scandalize the absent. I have repeatedly cautioned

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you against giving way to this un-  
amiable trait in your disposition ;  
and to my cautions I will now add  
an example of the ill consequences of  
indulging such a habit.

“ You have frequently remarked,  
as we walked over Brook’s meadow,  
a small lone house, which stood in  
the lane opposite the green, with  
the windows and doors constantly  
shut.

“ The inhabitant of this house is  
a Mrs., or, if you please, a Miss Cla-  
verton ; for she is still a single wo-  
man.

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“ She was one of many daughters, and, in her infancy, promised great things.

“ Her understanding was naturally good and comprehensive, quick and ready.

“ The acute answers she had for every question, and her aptness in learning, joined to the facility with which she accomplished all she undertook to perform, rendered her the darling of her parents, who, proud of her superior abilities, gratified her by a fond but false indulgence.

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“ She soon saw she was the favourite ; and the conviction which every hour brought of her being so, flattered her vanity, and made her presume too much upon her own importance.

“ She grew confident and talkative, intruding her discourse and observations with impertinence, whenever she appeared in company ; giving her opinions always as decisive ; dealing out her censure, or lavishing her applause, with the most unbounded freedom,

“ Her parents, far from checking,

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encouraged, by their smiles and approbation, a conduct highly reprehensible in so very young a person.

“ With a natural vein for sarcasm, and a great flow of wit, she became, as she grew up, a very dangerous girl.

“ Her sisters, who too often smarted, not only under the severity of her remarks, but through her influence with her mother, found themselves disregarded, or treated with contempt, carefully avoided her, and justly considered her as an enemy.

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“ Thus there were in the house of Mr. Claverton, two distinct parties ; the brothers and sisters uniting together against the parents and Jemima, who, like a second serpent, whispered in their ears, prejudiced them by her insinuations, and perpetually sowed discord in the family.

“ As the girls grew up, their dissensions increased.

“ Among the gentlemen who came to pay their respects to them, and whose situations and connexions in life entitled them to address the

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Miss Clavertons, was one of the name of Henley. He had seen and admired Emily, the second daughter and had asked permission of her father to visit at the house; a request which Mr. Claverton readily granted; for, as he had six daughters he was anxious to see some of them settled in life.

“ Unfortunately, Jemima saw Mr. Henley with too favourable an eye. She envied Emily the preference he manifested for her, and wished to turn the current of his attentions to herself; but she found this a very


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difficult task to accomplish. He was  
firmly attached to Emily; and her  
affections were equally fixed upon  
him.

“Jemima, whose unamiable temper had not only detached many lovers from herself, but from her sisters also, was generally disliked, and carefully watched by them.

“Martha, the fourth daughter, who had been deprived of a very amiable lover by her false insinuations, esteemed it her duty to warn the unsuspecting Emily to be upon her guard.



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“ I have reason to believe,” said Martha to Emily, “ that Jemima is endeavouring to gain Henley to herself: I would have you, my dear Emily, be careful of her: you know how she acted by me and Mr. Bray she may be as successful with Henley if you do not prevent it, by making him acquainted with her character and preparing him to answer her insinuations in some way that will convince her that he is not unacquainted with her designs.”

“ Emily, however, who was as amiable as Jemima was the reverse

plied, that she hoped Jemima could not be so base as to injure her, after the professions of regard which she had lately made.

“But I acknowledge,” added Emily, “that I am conscious there is just ground for suspicion in the character of Jemima, as well as from her recent conduct towards Mr. Lenley. I shall not, however, be too hasty in my proceedings.

Jemima continued her professions of regard to Emily, while she secretly endeavoured to supplant her in the heart of her lover, by per-

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suading him that her sister was not sincere in her professions, that she made him the subject of her sportive ridicule in all companies, and had treated several other young gentlemen in the same manner.

“Henley was astonished at this unexpected account, but had no suspicions respecting the veracity of Jemima, who had taken great pains to gain his good opinion by a number of pretended civilities; and as she communicated this information under a pretence that she could not bear to see so deserving a young gen-

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tleman made the sport of a giddy girl, he was prevailed on, though with great difficulty, to abandon the dear object of his affections, without assigning any reason for his conduct.

“ Poor Emily was miserable ; and a long and severe fit of illness, attended with a degree of mental derangement, was the consequence.

“ Jemima took very little pains to comfort her sister, though, hardened as she was, she must have felt some remorse. At last she said, “ I think, Emily, you ought to be glad that Henley is gone. I am sure he would

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have made a shocking husband. Indeed his conduct in deserting you, is a sufficient proof of the baseness of his heart."

"A short time after Mr. Henley had deserted Emily, a gentleman of the name of Manners came to reside in the neighbourhood.

"He had married a most amiable woman, with whom he enjoyed a high degree of felicity.

"The two families soon became acquainted; and Mrs. Manners was charmed with the modest and engaging deportment of Emily, who

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had recovered from her illness, and was by far the most discreet girl in the family.

“Jemima saw their growing intimacy with a jealous eye, and resolved to break it.

“In the course of conversation, one day, she asked Emily, what she saw in Mrs. Manners, to be so fond of.

“I think her an amiable and sensible woman,” replied Emily; and I believe her to be very sincere.”

“Do you?” returned Jemima, sneeringly, “I wish I could think

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so ; but you, Emily, are very credulous. I am sorry for you. I wish you may not be grossly deceived by your pretended friend."

"I hope I am not," returned her sister ; " I never like to think ill of any one, till I have found them really bad.—But what have you to say against Mrs. Manners ?"

" Oh, no matter," returned Jemima, " I know you would not give me credit, if I told you ; therefore you had better remain deceived ; and you may still continue your visits ; but, I assure you, I shall



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not. *My* character shall not suffer by going there."

"No, indeed," said Emily, "*your* character can never be injured by such connexions."

"Perhaps not, while she manages her affairs with such secrecy.—I have seen things that would change your opinion of her.—Perhaps you don't know that your late favourite Henley——"

"Henley!" exclaimed Emily with emotion, "what of him?"

"Oh, you pretend not to know that he visits Mrs. Manners in the


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absence of her husband, that he always goes in at the back door, and that he is ushered into Mrs. Manners's dressing room."

"I do not know it," said Emily; but I shall go immediately to Mrs. Manners, and tell her what you say."

"Jemima was alarmed at this, and used every artifice to keep her at home, but in vain. The name of Henley had attractions in it sufficient to render all opposition ineffectual.

"You may go, if you please,"

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said Jemima; "but if you knew how Mrs. Manners ridicules you to Henley, I'm sure you would stay at home."

"Emily was now ready to depart, and could not wait to make any reply.

"She soon reached Elm-Hall; but was surprised on her introduction to Mrs. Manners, to perceive a very unpleasant change in her conduct and conversation.

"Emily enquired the cause.

"If what I have been told is true," said Mrs. Manners, "the cause is

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sufficient to make me miserable.—

But I am not without hope that I shall still find you my friend, and not my enemy.—I hope what I have heard is not true.”

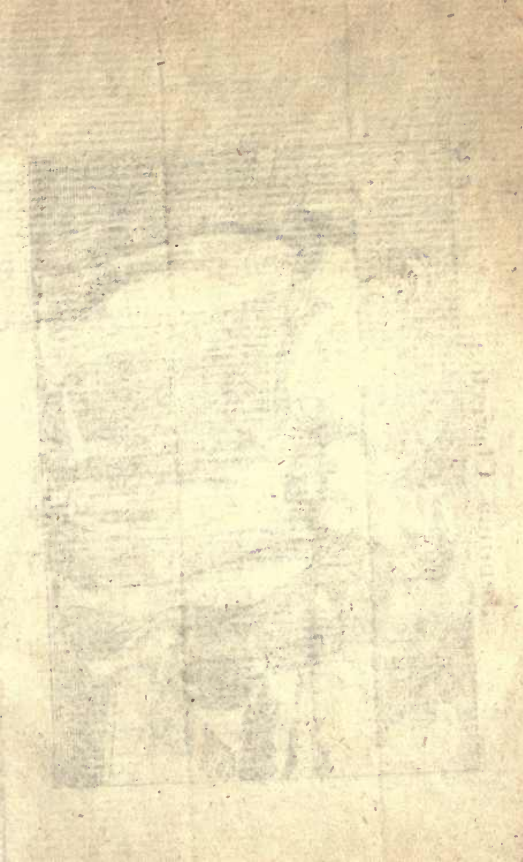
“Emily, who was all openness, and who really longed for an explanation as much as her friend, informed her what Jemima had said respecting Henley’s private access to her dressing room, and did not hesitate to repeat Jemima’s conclusive assertion, “If you knew how Mrs. Manners ridicules you to Henley, I’m sure you would stay at home.” She now

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informed Mrs. Manners, that she had come for the express purpose of making this discovery to her.

“ My dear Emily,” replied, Mrs. Manners, affectionately taking her hand, “ I now see clearly through the whole affair. Jemima has been the cause of Henley’s separation from you ; and she is now endeavouring to break that agreeable and friendly intercourse which has rendered the vicinity of our houses so agreeable ; far from speaking, I never even thought ill of you ; for there is no one I so much respect—As for the

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tale of Henley, I think I can very easily prove my innocence, and convince you how unmeritedly I have been censured upon that account; Henley is my brother, (I never owned it to you, because I was fearful, after what had passed between you, you might have been shy of me.) An unhappy quarrel, in which he was engaged, and which we feared might be followed by the most fatal consequences, rendered it necessary for him to be out of the way for a short time; he did not like to retreat without bidding me farewell; but

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the utmost secrecy was obliged to be observed in his coming hither, as those who knew the connexion between us, would readily seek him here; to avoid which, he was introduced by the housekeeper, one upon whose integrity I could rely, through the back door, to my dressing room. Manners had that day gone over to the house of the gentleman with whom Frederick had quarrelled, to see how he was, and try to effect a reconciliation between them. I am happy to say, all will be so well settled as to render my brother's absence



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unnecessary; but as he is with us, you shall hear the story from his own mouth."

"By no means," returned Emily, "I am perfectly satisfied, and blush for my rudeness."

"Mrs. Manners, however, who was anxious to call Emily sister, introduce Henley. An explanation took place, in which he produced a letter, which she knew immediately was Jemima's writing. It accused her, not only of a general levity and thoughtlessness of conduct, but even of admitting freedoms very inde-

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corous, and incompatible with female modesty.

“Shocked as Emily was at this proof of her sister’s perfidy and malice, she yet had command enough of herself to avoid all improper invectives, though she was much agitated when she was informed that Jemima knew that Mrs. Manners was Henley’s sister.

“Henley, who, from the account his sister gave of Emily, was convinced she had been accused wrongfully, was ashamed of his suspicions, and the credulous belief he had so hastily

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given to the false, but plausible and persuasive, representations of Jemima.

“ His union with Emily speedily took place.

“ Mr. Claverton did not long survive.

“ At his death, his family was dispersed. All, except Jemima, married into reputable families, and were happily settled ; but she, dreaded by all, and known as a traducer, was not only generally despised, but generally shunned ; for who can countenance a slanderer?

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“ The total, and indeed necessary neglect she has experienced, has so completely soured her temper, that she lives in perfect solitude, turning night into day, and is as careful to avoid being seen, as others are to see her; and yet, Sophia, at her first entrance on her slanderous career, I dare assert, neither she nor her parents, were aware of the extent of the mischief that might follow the indulgence of a slanderous tongue. Ridicule is a dangerous weapon in any hands; but scandal is a flagitious and barbarous vice, which

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spreads far and near, sparing neither sex nor age : the thief that stops you on the highway, and robs you of your gold, is an honest character, compared to the slanderer. How beautifully Shakspear has it, when he says,

“ Good name, my lord, in man or woman,

“ Is the immediate jewel of their souls.

“ Who steals my purse, steals trash : ’tis something, nothing.

“ T’was mine, ’tis his, and has been slave to thousands ;

“ But he, who filches from me my good name,

“ Takes from me that, which not enriches him,

“ And leaves me poor indeed.”

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“ Believe me, Sophy, there is no character so thoroughly to be dreaded as one that converts every word and look into a fault. No one was yet ever formed that was all perfection ; and, with all the care and circumspection in the world, we are liable to error. It is necessary, then, before we sit in judgment upon others, to look into ourselves : we should there descry many little black spots, which would demand all our attention and care, to cleanse. Now you have this morning been passing very free, and, in my opinion, very illiberal remarks,

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upon very deserving people ; how would you like to hear these remarks repeated, with a thousand exaggerations, (which is usually the case,) or how would you feel, when, in consequence of your slanderous aspersions, you were called upon to answer them in a court of Justice, by proving the truth of them : such things are done every day, and the laws of England provide against offences of this nature, by awarding ample damages against the slanderer. There cannot be so tender a point as character ; that, once lost, or even as-



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persed, cannot be retrieved; then, of all our possessions, it is the most valuable, because no money can purchase it, and once lost, no care can redeem it. The censorious and malicious, like Jemima Claverton, will not only infallibly be exposed, but despised; for who can respect those who manifest such evident marks of an ill temper, and bad heart."

"Bad heart, Mamma!" said Sophy, "sure you do not think I have a bad heart."

"I cannot believe you have a good


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one, while you delight in speaking ill of your neighbours; to be loved, you must endeavour to hide the faults of your friends, and set their virtues in as fair a point of view as possible. I remember a very good natured rebuke given by an old gentleman to a party of ladies, who were tearing to pieces the character of an absent person. We had been invited to a ball and supper at his house. During tea, the name of a lady was mentioned, who was expected to have been there, but who was unable to come till a late hour

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on account of some family concerns, which required her presence. Every one was finding fault with her; none, I believe, but myself and another young lady, but had some invidious remark, or ill natured observation, to make. The gentleman of the house did not appear, at the time, to take much notice of the discourse; but when a cessation of tongues gave him room to be heard, he rose up, and whimsically bowing, thanked the ladies, in the name of the absentee, for their general good opinion of her, who, he assured them,



Jemima Claverton.

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would shortly be there to thank them herself; then, seating himself, he immediately began to converse upon a different subject. In the course of the evening, Mr. Pigott appeared. Our host led her into the circle. Never did I see such confusion as sat upon the countenances of all present, when Mr. Bell, advancing and leading her to her seat, told her, loud enough for every one to hear, she knew not how much she was indebted to the company present, for their general good opinion of her, and regret at her absence; adding,

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“ My dear madam, if you were to live an age, you could not repay the very fine things that have been said of you ; almost all these ladies, tried who should praise you most ; indeed I, who have often been told that Scandal was chief waiter at the tea-table, was delighted to find she had fled from our society ; and I hope she will never return, but her place be supplied by Goodhumour and Cheerfulness.’ Many felt the reproof as it was intended ; and no more scandal was heard.



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